

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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C O N F I D E N T I A L KUALA LUMPUR 5686

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF, MY
SUBJECT: MALAYSIAN ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS ON INDOCHINA REFUGEES

REF: CANBERRA 4356

1. SUMMARY. RECENT GOM STATEMENTS AND ACTIONS REFLECT
GROWING CONCERN ABOUT REFUGEE FLOW. THERE IS NO
INDICATION THAT GOM HAS ALTERED ITS BASIC HUMANITARIAN APPROACH
OF PROVIDING FIRST ASYLUM TO REFUGEES IN NEED, BUT SOME MEASURES
HAVE BEEN ANNOUNCED AND TAKEN WHICH TIGHTEN UP PROCEDURES
AND COULD MAKE THEIR LANDING HERE MORE DIFFICULT. IT IS
NOT YET CLEAR WHETHER LAST WEEK'S NOTICEABLE DECLINE IN ARRIVALS
REFLECTS THESE MEASURES. CURRENT US AND AUSTRALIAN EFFORTS
AT RESETTLEMENT ARE APPRECIATED BUT RECOGNIZED AS
INSUFFICIENT IF THE LAST TWO MONTHS' RATE OF ARRIVALS
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CONTINUES. END SUMMARY.

2. HIGH-LEVEL GOM OFFICIALS HAVE COMMENTED PUBLICLY
RECENTLY ON THE GROWING REFUGEE PROBLEM HERE. FOREIGN
MINISTER RITHAUDDEEN HAS TOLD SEVERAL LOCAL
POLITICAL GATHERINGS THAT WHILE THE REFUGEE TIDE
POSES SERIOUS PROBLEMS FOR MALAYSIA, THE GOM WILL CONTINUE

ITS "HUMANITARIAN" POLICY OF ALLOWING REFUGEES TO LAND PENDING PERMANENT RESETTLEMENT ELSEWHERE. HE ALSO ANNOUNCED ON JUNE 4 THAT THE REFUGEE SITUATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA WILL BE BROUGHT UP FOR DISCUSSION AT THE FORTHCOMING MEETING OF THE ASEAN FOREIGN MINISTERS IN PATTAYA, THAILAND, THIS WEEK.

3. FOCUSING MORE ON THE SECURITY ASPECTS OF THE REFUGEE SITUATION, HOM MINISTER GHAZALI SHAFIE TOLD NEWSMEN DURING A RECENT VISIT TO THE PULAU BESAR CAMP THAT HE SEES THE REFUGEE PROBLEM AS A PROTRACTED ONE, PARTICULARLY IN VIEW OF THE LATEST CHINESE EXODUS FROM VIETNAM, AND ANNOUNCED THAT THE GOM WOULD STEP UP ITS NAVAL PATROLS TO HELP CHECK THE GROWING INFLUX. HE ALSO ANNOUNCED THAT THE TWO MAJOR EAST COAST CAMPS AT PULAU BESAR AND PULAU TENGAH WOULD HENCEFORTH BE "PROTECTED AREAS" (I.E., RESTRICTED AREAS), AS WOULD BE THE OFFSHORE OIL RIGS WHERE REFUGEES HAVE CONSTITUTED A SECURITY THREAT BY THEIR ENCROACHMENT ON THESE FACILITIES.

4. GHAZALI ALSO INDICATED, HOWEVER, THAT THE GOM MUST DEAL "FAIRLY AND POSITIVELY" WITH THE PROBLEM AND CITED OTHER COUNTRIES' EFFORTS TO RESETTLE THE REFUGEES PERMANENTLY. HE NOTED THE US HAS AGREED TO ACCEPT A "SUITABLE NUMBER", AS HAS AUSTRALIA.

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5. LOCAL GOM OFFICIALS HAVE ALSO EXPRESSED CONCERN TO US AND AUSTRALIAN REFUGEE OFFICERS OVER THE INCREASING ARRIVALS. THE IN-CAMP BOAT POPULATION NOW TOPS THE 10,000 MARK, AND THIS REALIZATION SEEMS TO HAVE PROMPTED THEM TO EXPRESS EVEN GREATER INTEREST IN US AND OTHER COUNTRIES' EFFORTS TO RELIEVE THE SITUATION.

6. COMMENT. WHETHER OR NOT THIS INCREASED CONCERN AND THE NEW SECURITY MEASURES ANNOUNCED BY GHAZALI HAVE ACTUALLY DETERRED ARRIVALS REMAINS UNCLEAR. ARRIVALS AT MALAYSIA'S EAST COAST CONTINUE BUT FOR LAST WEEK WERE DOWN SHARPLY TO LESS THAN HALF THOSE OF THE PREVIOUS SEVERAL WEEKS. THIS COULD BE NO MORE THAN A TEMPORARY FLUCTUATION, BUT WE DO KNOW OF INSTANCES IN LATE MAY AND EARLY JUNE WHERE BOATLOADS OF REFUGEES WERE INITIALLY DETERRED FROM LANDING AT PULAU BESAR AND WERE ONLY ABLE TO LAND AFTER ELUDING NAVAL CRAFT OR AFTER INTERVENTION BY UNHCR REP.

7. RITHAUDDEEN'S REITERATION OF THE GOM'S HUMANITARIAN ATTITUDE AND GHAZALI'S RELATIVELY POSITIVE REMARKS

ABOUT THE NEED TO DEAL FAIRLY WITH THE PROBLEM AND ABOUT
US EFFORTS TO ASSIST FOLLOWED DISCUSSIONS WITH THE
AMBASSADOR PRIOR TO THE LATTER'S DEPARTURE FOR CONSUL-
TATIONS IN WASHINGTON. THESE STATEMENTS SEEM FAIRLY
ENCOURAGING AS FAR AS THEY GO. GHAZALI'S OTHER REMARKS
AND THE MEASURES HE ANNOUNCED, ON THE OTHER HAND,
ILLUSTRATE THE REVERSE SIDE OF THE COIN IN GOM THINKING, I.E. THE
SERIOUS SECURITY AND POLITICAL PROBLEMS THE
REFUGEES POSE. THE LATEST NEWS OF A MASSIVE ETHNIC
CHINESE EXODUS FROM VIETNAM HARDLY REASSURES THE
MALAYSIANS, CONSIDERING THEY ARE AWARE THAT CHINESE
ALREADY COMPRISE HALF OR MORE OF THE REFUGEES ARRIVING
OVER THE PAST FEW MONTHS. MOREOVER, NATIONAL ELECTIONS
HAVE JUST BEEN ANNOUNCED FOR JULY 8. WE DO NOT
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EXPECT REFUGEES TO BECOME A MAJOR CAMPAIGN ISSUE, BUT THE
CAMPAIGN ITSELF IS LIKELY TO ADD TO THE PRESSURES
ON THE GOM TO SOUND AND ACT A LITTLE TOUGHER,
PROBABLY ALONG THE LINES GHAZALI HAS EXPRESSED.

8. GOM OFFICIALS AT BOTH THE NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEVEL
CLEARLY APPRECIATE US RESETTLEMENT EFFORTS AND REMAIN
EXTREMELY COOPERATIVE. BUT THEY CAN ADD, AND THEY SEE OUR
CURRENT PROGRAMS (AND THOSE OF OTHER COUNTRIES) AS
POTENTIALLY INSUFFICIENT IN THE LONG RUN IF PRESENT
ARRIVAL RATES CONTINUE. WHILE THEY ARE ALREADY AWARE
OF OUR PROPOSED NEW PROGRAM FOR TAKING 25,000 INDOCHINA
REFUGEES A YEAR, ITS OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENT AND ACTUAL
INITIATION WILL NEVERTHELESS BE WELCOME AND WILL HELP
RELIEVE SOME OF THE PRESSURES ON THEM FOR A TOUGHER
LINE.
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